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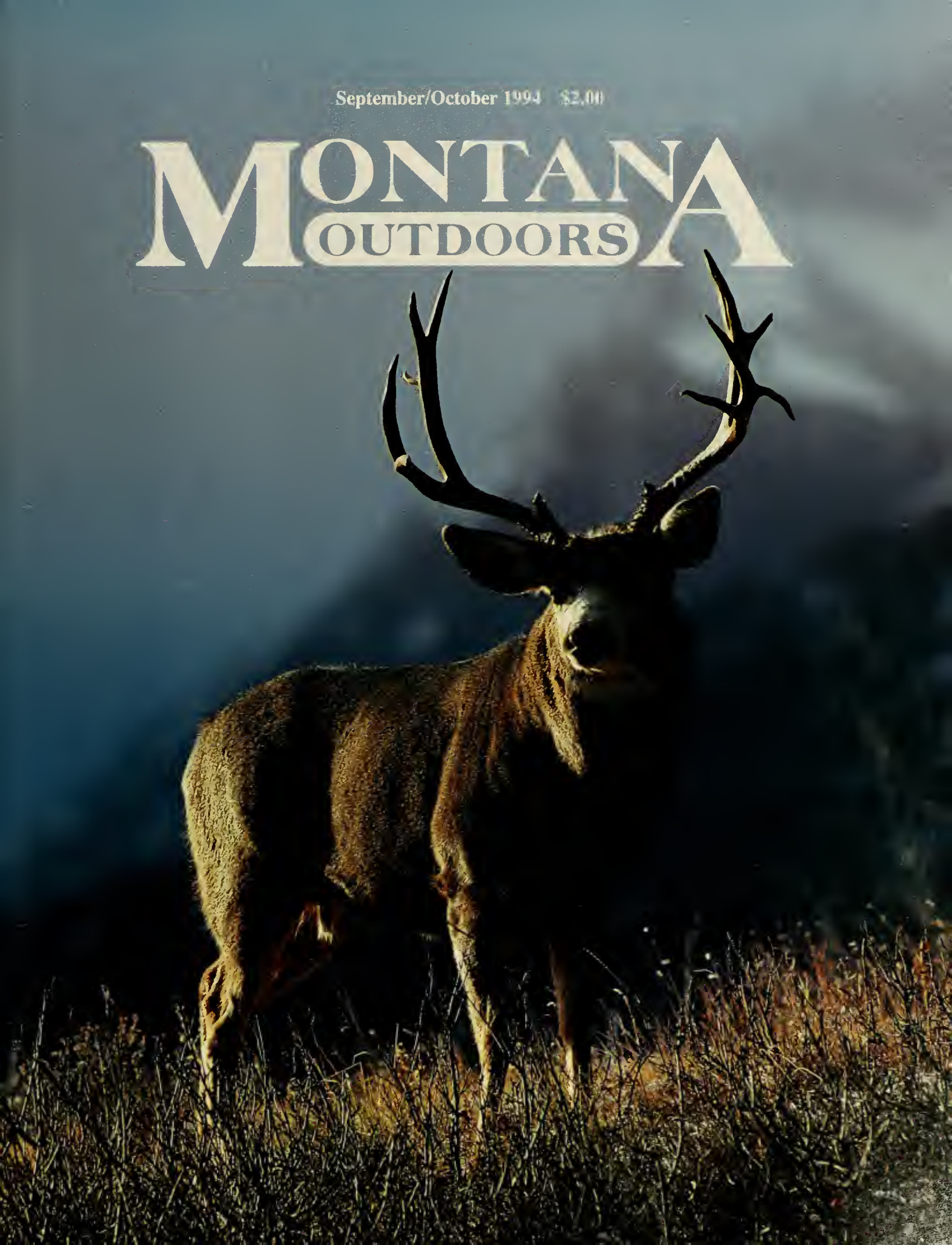
MONTANA OUTDOORS



Our Point of View

BARBARA THOMAS

Each nation, each culture, is a product of its land and people. One shapes the other. Those who preceded us on this land shaped it in a way that influenced our generation, as we will shape the next.

Yet, our understanding of the land and other peoples is limited. It is limited by what we know and what we think we know. This plays a large part in how we choose to interact both with the land and other peoples.

For example, historians believe there were about 18 million Native Americans in the United States in the 1500s. Most became victims of diseases introduced by early explorers long before the majority of European settlers entered the scene.

So it was presumed that these Native Americans had little impact on the American landscape. But there is evidence they profoundly shaped many forests and grasslands for centuries through the use of fire to clear lands for passage, hunting, or growing crops. Some, particularly in the Great Plains, also traveled great distances across common hunting grounds.

Today, Montana is home to seven Indian nations. Their reservations occupy over five million acres, or 6.5% of the state. Their cultures are clearly different from European cultures, and even different from each other.

When the tribes entered these reservations, they signed treaties with the U.S. government. Each treaty was different, but most retained some rights for hunting and fishing. The full scope of these rights has been a point of contention for years.

In other states, tribal hunting and fishing rights have been contested in time-consuming and costly court battles. Most often, the tribes' rights have been upheld.

In Montana we had the choice of following this course or proceeding down a different path. The path we chose avoids the most contentious differences, and instead focuses on the fish and wildlife resources and their regulated harvest.

The state negotiated the first such agreement with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes in 1990. This fall the agreement is up for renewal (see page 12). We are also exploring similar agreements with the Rocky Boy, Fort Belknap, Fort Peck, and Crow reservations.

These agreements are not intended to help one side gain jurisdictional advantage over the other, nor are they meant to judge the values of one culture or another. They are intended only to simplify the licensing and regulations for harvesting fish and gamebirds on tribal and non-tribal lands within the reservations. They can also be the basis for cooperatively managing fish and wildlife resources. After all, fish and wildlife don't recognize political boundaries.

Like each treaty, each tribe, and each piece of land, each agreement is unique. For some, these agreements evoke feelings of guilt or remorse; for others, anger and loss of control; for still others, they are the foundation of a bridge between different cultures over common lands.

Today we shape the landscape for the next generation.

Patrick J. Graham, Director
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

DAVE BOOKS

On the Montana prairie in September, bird dogs, shotguns, and sharptails are a hard combination to beat (page 22).

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MONTANA OUTDOORS

September/October 1994
Volume 25, Number 5

Features

2 WHY WE HUNT
by Eileen Clarke
When a woman hunter heads for the hills, the quality of the meat that ends up on the table is likely to be foremost in her mind.

7 WATCHABLE WILDLIFE—
A NARROW FELLOW IN THE GRASS
by Dave Books
Prairie rattlesnakes aren't sinister creatures lying in wait for unsuspecting humans, they are simply going about the business of living.

12 FINDING COMMON GROUND
by John Fraley
A state/tribal agreement is working for hunters and anglers on western Montana's Flathead Reservation.

17 LANDS LEGACY—GOOD DEEDS WITHOUT DEEDS
by Pat Gunderson
A complex conservation easement package has guaranteed habitat protection and hunting access on 40,000 acres in eastern Montana.

22 PERSPECTIVES—IN SEPTEMBER, IT'S SHARPTAILS
by Bernie Kuntz
Sharp-tailed grouse, bird dogs, and shotguns are a September tradition for many Montana hunters.

25 MULE DEER ARE MORE FUN
by Bill McRae
If the gods of the hunt got mean-spirited and decreed you could only hunt one species the rest of your days, which one would *you* choose?

Departments

30 CATCHALL—Long-time enforcement chief Kent retires
34 READERS RESPOND—Divergent views on CRP
36 FROM THE FIELD—New regulations boost bull elk numbers
37 CONTRIBUTORS

COVERS—Mule deer by Bill McRae
Sharp-tailed grouse by Rodney Schlecht

Why We Hunt

"In my crowd, the line is drawn indelibly in the sand. For the men antlers are a prime motivator; for the women, it's the quality of the meat that ends up on the table."

by Eileen Clarke

Four years ago, I drew a Shiras moose tag. I was immediately inundated with free advice: where to hunt, what to hunt with—my .270 was entirely inadequate, I was told—and what time of year to find a really big bull. I had a few ideas of my own, however. I'd had the good fortune the previous year to help a friend butcher a really large bull moose. He had hunted all season, through all kinds of weather, looking for a once-in-a-lifetime bull, finally picking up its trail on the last week of the season—after the rut, into the cold, desperate time. Despite the fact that he'd aged it very carefully, the meat was tough as nails.

With my own tag in hand, I listened to the advice, researched loads and bullets, even shot my husband's .30-06, and then went out opening day and shot the first young bull I saw with my trusty old .270. By ten o'clock of opening day my bull was hanging in a cool, clean garage. My friends with the good advice—all who happen to have been men—have given me a lot of good-natured grief since then over wasting a once-in-a-lifetime Shiras tag. Then I broil them a steak and they are amazed that a moose can be that tender.

It doesn't taste at all like the moose they've shot. Then, before they can even swallow comes "But, oh man. How could you waste that tag?"

In my crowd, the line is drawn indelibly in the sand. For the men antlers are a prime motivator; for the women, it's the quality of the meat that ends up on the table. I once ran into a trio of teenage boys in my favorite whitetail spot. One of them had seen a buck, shot, and the three of them were approaching the animal, arguing back and forth. Apparently the one who shot was the only one who saw the antlers. As they got closer, the argument became louder, until finally they got to the deer. The antlers were three inches long—the shooter a hero. No doubt that yearling buck will taste good, but that never crossed his mind when he pulled the trigger.

Like those boys, men are more likely to hunt with a companion. The women I know hunt alone. They list lots of reasons, including being able to set their own pace, and enjoying the quiet of the woods. Here are two waterfowl hunts typical of my experience. During the first my friend Sil and I sat on a small island in November hunting waterfowl. We watched the sunrise, the birds, the color of winter grass—all without saying 10 words to each other. Sil even shot a goose that day. The next day I went out with the guys. There were four of us, on a small duck slough, 10 and 20 yards apart. The men chattered all morning until I finally said, "Can't you be quiet? You're scaring all the ducks away." I was informed that the ducks didn't care. Problem is, I care: I don't get up at four in the morning to sit out in a cold wind and listen to the same conversation I can hear around the kitchen table at two in the afternoon.

Women work harder at shooting accurately. Eileen Damone grew up in a hunting family, but didn't start hunting till she married Buck. One day he showed her how to shoot his open-sight, octagon barrel .22. "I wasn't working," she says, "so I plinked all day. Then one day Buck said, 'How you doin'?' and I hit the small end of the little .22 shell box at 30 yards offhand."

Sil Strung shot a moose one year—a Shiras meat bull a lot like mine. She got a steady rest and took her time, but the bull kept walking. She aimed again and shot. This time it fell over dead. When she skinned it out, she found both holes—both through the heart within an inch of each other.

Women take fewer chances shooting, working harder to approach unalarmed game. I took a gunsmith friend out after antelope one year. We spent the first day walking miles and miles of sagebrush not seeing a single animal. Then early the second day, I spotted two bucks. The plan was to sneak up behind a gumbo knob within 200 yards of the bucks, and shoot from a prone position. I would take the second shot—if they hung around, which they sometimes do when they don't know where you are. But Bill decided he wasn't comfortable lying on his belly—he was a shotgunner, used to shooting offhand on his hind legs—so he jumped up and spooked the

JOHN HARRISON

"Why do we hunt? It's something we don't do lightly. Only 13% of Montana hunters are women and those who do often are harassed more by their other women friends than the men. Like female stereotypes in old western movies, we're supposed to be more 'civilized' than the male of the species. But there's nothing else I do that absorbs me 100% mentally and *physically at the same time."*

BILL SWANSON

Whether it's setting their own pace or enjoying the quiet of the woods, many women prefer to hunt alone.

antelope, then shot at the slower buck. It took us the rest of the day to find him and finish the job.

Next day, it was my turn. We found a small herd grazing along a sandbar. I lay down on the rim of a hill overlooking the animals, set my pack in front of me, put the rifle on the pack, got my hands, knees, and toes set. All the time Bill was whispering insistently, "Hurry up they're moving. Hurry up and shoot." Then when I made a clean heart shot, he tried to convince me that I needed a custom rifle. "If your rifle fit you better," he said, "you'd shoot faster." A custom rifle might fit me better, but I'll never shoot faster.

Once we find a gun that works, we don't experiment. One year my husband bought a .30-30 with open sights and decided he wanted to do a primitive hunt. He made a good shot, but we never found the doe. It was irrational—people have used .30-30's for decades—but I had a hard time not being angry with him for not using his same old boring trusted rifle with his same old trusted handload and boring four-power scope. He started bow hunting, and I quickly bought a bow, too. I was intrigued by the idea of lengthening my season and hunting in good weather besides. But while he killed a five-point elk that first fall, I went five years not trusting the bow to kill as quickly and cleanly as my trusty .270. Finally, last fall, after practicing four to five months a year for five years, I took a shot at a grouse, straight up overhead, 25 feet up a spruce tree. I aimed for the neck, figuring if I missed left or right I'd miss clean. I decapitated it. My hunting partners challenged me to do it again to prove it wasn't a fluke. The second grouse landed by the first. Next year, I'll trust my bow to be accurate enough for elk.

It may sound, from the way we fret and worry over the small stuff, that we don't enjoy being out there as much as our brothers, husbands, fathers, and sons. I think it's just the opposite. When I bow hunt, I go out an hour early—more than the two hours I've already allotted for sinking into the woodwork—just to enjoy the day. If there is a heaven, it has to be a river bottom on a warm September afternoon, full of foxes and pheasants, marsh hawks and herons; or a brilliant blue sky over an October prairie with flight upon flight of sandhill cranes warbling overhead.

I know why my neighbors hunt. Tiffany and Tabitha Rightnour are 12 and 14 years old. Last fall their dad, Jay, took them out for antelope with another friend, Janea Wenzel, also 14. They enjoyed not having to worry about school; the prairie smell, the animals, hiking, just getting away. Tiffany shot a buck the first morning with one shot. Then the other two girls got the fever. That afternoon, they saw a 16-inch buck. Jay says, "I always wanted a big buck, but it was Tabby's turn. I pointed out a 14 incher to Janea and got them both lined out on the ground, warning Janea to wait till Tabby shot." Jay knelt between the two girls, and waited. But it was Janea who shot first, at the big buck. "I got confused," she said later. "I thought Tabitha wanted the smaller one." (Right. She kept hearing this voice in her head saying, "I want *that* one. I *want* that one.")

I asked what they enjoyed most. They had a long list. Skinning, boning, and trimming, they agreed. "It's scientific," Tiffany added. "When you go, Dad teaches you the heart and liver and lungs and everything. Books show you, but I was *holding* the esophagus. It's kinda cool."

Jenny Brooks is also 14, and hunted antelope for the first time last fall. To make up for missing English class, she kept a journal of her trip, and while her Dad and teacher expected a few paragraphs over a three-day period, Jenny wrote eight pages, single-spaced, about the hunt, the country, the other hunters she saw out on the prairie. But most of all, when you talk to her, you feel her sense of pride. Jenny plans to be an architect, and enjoys working with her Dad's power tools. She designed and built the trophy plaque for her buck. "It hangs in *my*

BARBARA THOMAS

EILEEN CLARKE

Men and *women take special pleasure in introducing their children to hunting and teaching them about the natural world.*

room," she says, smiling.

Why do we hunt? It's something we don't do lightly. Only 13% of Montana hunters are women and those who do often are harassed more by their other women friends than the men. Like female stereotypes in old western movies, we're supposed to be more "civilized" than the male of the species. But there's nothing else I do that absorbs me 100% mentally *and* physically at the same time. Eileen Damone enjoys the feeling that no matter what happens, she can put food on the table. Jenny Brooks felt great pride at field dressing her own animal and designing and building her trophy plaque. The Rightnour girls have an immense curiosity about the natural world.

My friend Gail Haviland has three young boys, and while she loves to hunt mountain grouse, she takes special pleasure in taking her boys hunting. Paul is 15, Bryan is 12 and will take hunter safety this year, and Thomas is nine.

BEN O. WILLIAMS

Women work hard at shooting accurately; when they find a gun that works, they don't experiment.

"I take a gun, too, but I let Paul take the first shot. I want them to know how to do it. Where to look. I also want them to know women are strong, too. Hunting isn't just a masculine sport. Boys have this feeling of superiority. They need to see women aren't afraid of being out in the woods. Afraid of lions and tigers and bears."

Laurie Lee Dovey loves the competition. "I go out there with a plan," she says, "and set it up and then, when I know I could take the shot, I've won. The best part is there's no classes out in the woods. The one who works hardest wins."

I WORKED VERY HARD three years ago to get a ewe bighorn. It was September and warm and the sheep weren't coming down from the high country, so I climbed up to where they were hanging out. I didn't know it at the time, but I was working on one lung, and that lung was hampered by exercise-induced asthma. I told that story recently when I spoke to Mavis Lorenz. If you haven't heard of her, hold on. She shot a bighorn ram last fall that scored 200 1/8—the largest ever taken by a woman in the contiguous U.S.—destined to fall somewhere around number 8 in Boone and Crockett.

I called her out of the blue and she started telling me about the hunt: how big the sheep was, what she shot it with, like she was reciting the 46 prepositions of the English language with all the excitement of watching paint dry. I told her about my ewe, and she immediately brightened. "Isn't the meat good?"

As she started to tell the story again, this time telling it to a fellow hunter, she sounded like all the other women I'd ever hunted with. She likes to hunt alone; she likes walking at her own pace, "putzing" as she called it. She is very careful: having tried for 18 years to draw this tag, she rented videos of bighorn sheep and memorized the three points of a large ram. She didn't experiment with rifles, instead shooting a pre-64 Model 70 Winchester in .30-06 with 180-grain bullets. Like Jenny and Tabitha, she was analytic, finding the spent bullet, and tracing its path. "It stopped in the seventh cervical vertebra," she said. And knowing she wanted a large ram, she went to a taxidermist beforehand asking how to take care of the hide. Duncan Gilchrist demonstrated the anatomy on his sleeping Labrador, rolling the pup left and right to describe the cuts. Mavis took notes, made drawings, and then set them down on index cards and had them laminated.

"Thank goodness I had them laminated," she told me. "It was lightning and thundering, and raining like mad as I was doing the skinning."

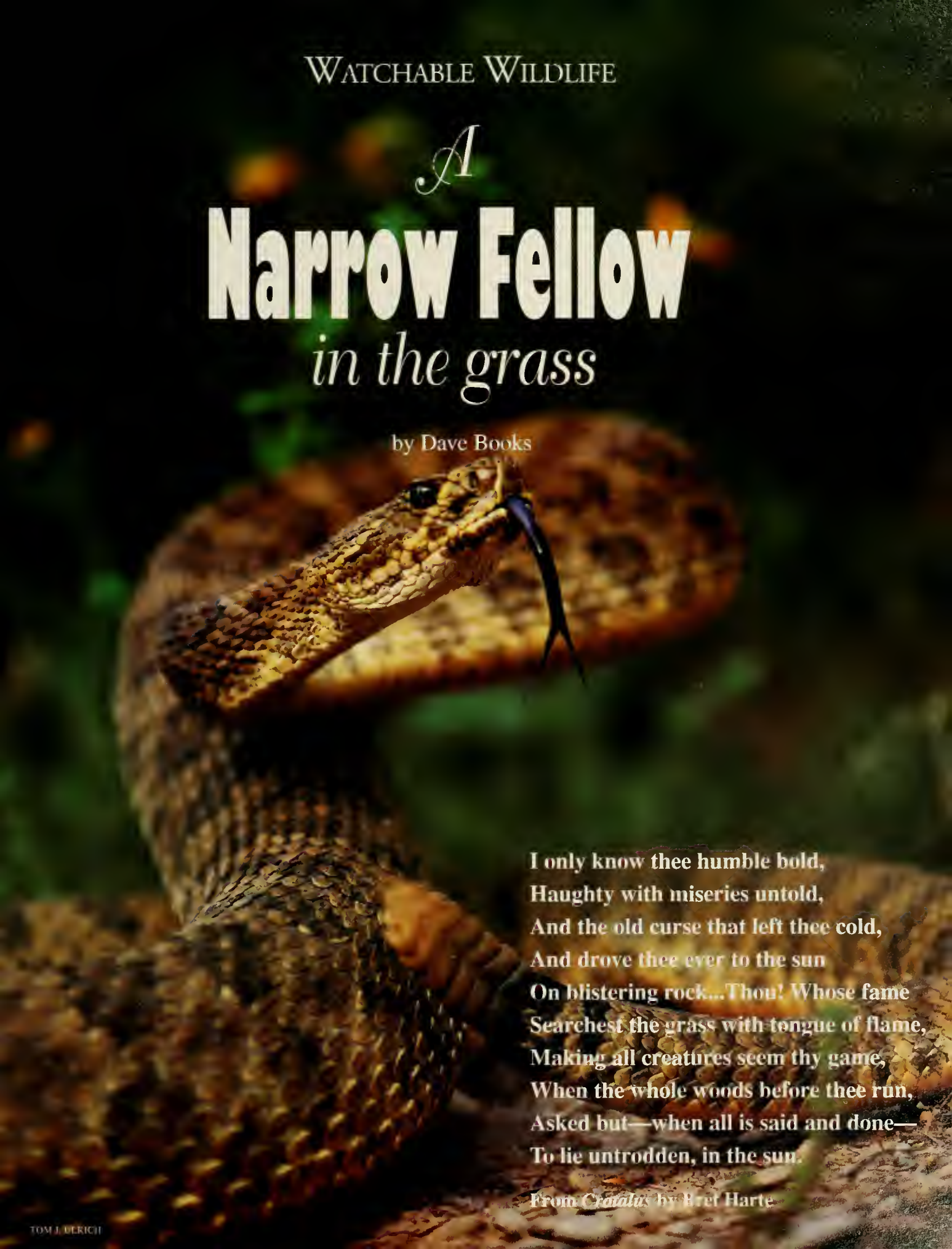
Then she said she was toying with going on a Dall sheep hunt, and I had to ask: "Would you consider yourself a trophy hunter?"

"Oh, no. That Dall sheep hunt, I can't afford to just go. I'm hoping to get a cancellation—maybe get a deal. I have a cholesterol problem. The only red meat I eat is game."

Why we hunt; a lot of the answers are the same. Maybe that's because there are so few of us, there's not much room for variance. Women my age tell me that when they took hunter safety in the 1960s they were the only girl in the class. Jenny, Tabitha, Janea, and Tiffany say their classes in Helena and Bozeman were 50-50. Perhaps as the numbers of women hunters rise, from 13% of the general population to 50%, it will be more of a cross-section: more social hunters and more trophy hunters; more experimental and more low-key types. I believe I will always be one of the unreconstructed. Like the first year I hunted, taking a stand on a bitterly cold day and being excited that I'd seen two ducks floating in a little backwater of Rock Creek preening each other. I was 10 feet away for more than an hour and they never knew I was there. Did I see a monster whitetail buck, or a seven-point elk, supposedly what I was out there for? No. It didn't matter. As long as there's game in the freezer, I don't think it ever will. ■

A Narrow Fellow in the grass

by Dave Books



I only know thee humble bold,
Haughty with miseries untold,
And the old curse that left thee cold,
And drove thee ever to the sun
On blistering rock....Thou! Whose fame
Searchest the grass with tongue of flame,
Making all creatures seem thy game,
When the whole woods before thee run,
Asked but—when all is said and done—
To lie untrodden, in the sun.

From *Crotalus* by Bret Harte

TOM J. BERICH

RON SPOMER

Rattlesnakes detect their quarry both by sight and by heat-sensing pits located midway between the eye and nostril (left). These pits, which can sense an object less than one degree warmer than their surroundings, enable the snake to strike warm-blooded prey with great accuracy day or night. The rattlesnake's forked tongue (right) "tastes the air" and carries airborne molecules to the Jacobson's organ, a chemosensory receptor in the roof of the mouth that analyzes smells.

IF YOU SPEND MUCH TIME outdoors in Montana, an eventual encounter with Bret Harte's *Crotalus*—the rattlesnake—is a pretty good bet. It doesn't have to be a terrifying or heart-stopping experience, although most of us will notice an immediate and significant increase in our pulse rate. It may help to remember that even though the prairie rattlesnake, *Crotalus viridis viridis*, is abundant and widely distributed in Montana, only a few people are bitten each year.

"Prairie rattlers are more common than most people realize, but generally they're not aggressive and won't strike unless provoked," says Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks nongame coordinator Dennis Flath. "Rattlesnakes use their venom primarily for obtaining food. The only reason for them to strike at anything as large as a human is out of self-defense.

"Children are at greatest risk, because they often don't realize the danger and tend to be focused on what they're doing," he says. "And their smaller body size makes them more vulnerable if they're bitten.

"Because of their curious nature, dogs are probably the most common victims of rattlesnake bite, especially during the early fall hunting season. Most dogs bitten by prairie rattlers don't die, but they get awfully sick," says Flath.

A subspecies of the western rattlesnake, the prairie rattlesnake is Montana's only poisonous snake. According to *Peterson's Field Guide to Venomous Animals & Poisonous Plants*, it is found in "prairies, cultivated land, brush, sandy areas, woodland, forest, rocky slopes, along streams, and caves." It occupies most portions of Montana with the exception of the extreme northwestern and northeastern corners of the state.

Considering how widely distributed poisonous snakes are across the lower 48 states (at least one species is present in every state but Maine), and how many people live, work, and recreate in snake country, the number of fatalities nationwide is extremely low. In a typical year, fewer than 15 people die from the bites of rattlesnakes, copperheads, cottonmouths, and coral snakes combined—in fact, you are more likely to be killed by lightning, an insect bite, or a fall in your bathtub. In Montana, only one person—a 2-year-old child—has died from snakebite in the last 30 years, while bee-sting fatalities are recorded fairly regularly.

But statistics aren't very comforting should you be bitten by a rattlesnake. The venom is a potent, dangerous substance that contains primarily hemotoxins but also some neurotoxins. Manufactured by venom glands located on each side of

GREG YOUNG

the head and delivered by two fangs that fold up inside the snake's mouth when not in use, rattlesnake venom destroys blood cells, lymphatic vessels, capillaries, and muscle tissue—its function is not only to kill the prey but to help digest it as well. While these toxins are sufficient to kill a small mammal very quickly, the damage sustained by humans results more from "necrosis," a painful, progressive deterioration of tissue, vessels, and cells.

Rattlesnakes detect their quarry either by sight during daytime or at night through heat-sensing pits located midway between each eye and nostril. These pits, which are attuned to infrared radiation, enable "pit vipers"—members of the subfamily Crotalinae—to locate warm-blooded prey in the dark and strike with great precision day or night. According to an article in *Science* magazine, the pits can register the heat of a human hand held a foot away. Like most snakes, rattlesnakes have a keen sense of smell; in addition to an external "nose," they have a pair of holes in the roof of the mouth called the Jacobson's organ that analyzes smells brought to it by the tongue. This explains why snakes constantly flick their tongue in and out of their mouth, as if tasting the air.

Because they are cold-blooded, rattlesnakes depend on the temperature of the surrounding environment to regulate their body heat. Temperatures below freezing or above 100 degrees F. are fatal for them, and they are relatively inactive at temperatures below 50 degrees F. To survive the Montana winter, rattlesnakes congregate in communal dens or "hibernacula" below the frost line, usually in rocky areas. One den may contain dozens or even hundreds of rattlesnakes, in addition to snakes of other species.

Researchers in Idaho and Wyoming have found that when rattlesnakes emerge from their dens in spring they travel a straight-line distance of up to seven miles to areas with abundant mice, ground squirrels, or other small rodents. Pregnant females are an exception—they stay closer to the den so that their young, which are born in late summer, will have a shorter travel distance in the fall. During the spring dispersal, each snake moves several hundred yards a day, unless its travel is interrupted by the need to digest a meal. In mid-summer, after reaching its destination and hunting the area for two or three weeks, the snake reverses direction and again takes a direct route back to the den.

If a male crosses the trail of a female on his return trip, he may follow the "pheromones"—chemicals she secretes to mark her path—until he catches up with her. If the female is receptive to breeding (in northern climates, rattlesnakes breed only about one year out of three), she may allow him to mate with her. If so, the two stay together a few days, then resume their individual journeys to the den.

The female carries the sperm in her body through the winter, and the eggs are fertilized the following spring. She will remain in a rocky area near the den through the summer to better regulate her body temperature while the embryos develop. According to Idaho researcher Vincent Cobb, pregnant females try to maintain their body temperature as close to 88 to 90 degrees F. as possible. At night, when temperatures drop, they crawl into pockets of heat-radiating rocks to keep warm. Because rattlesnakes live roughly 20 years and don't reach sexual maturity until they are 6 or 7, Cobb speculates that females may bear only about five litters during their lifetime.

Rattlesnakes are *ovoviviparous*, which means they bear live young produced from eggs that develop inside the female's body. (*Oviparous* snakes produce eggs that hatch after laying). Young rattlesnakes are born in thin, transparent sacs that must be ruptured by the egg tooth before the young snakes can begin breathing. The offspring, usually four to twelve, are about seven inches long and born complete with venom glands, fangs, and the pre-button beginning of a rattle. Although the young snakes seem able to fend for themselves, the mother stays with them for about a week.

BILL MCRAE

By congregating in communal dens or "hibernacula" below the frost line, cold-blooded rattlesnakes can survive the freezing temperatures of winter.

Prairie rattlesnakes can grow to a maximum size of about six feet, although they average only three to four feet in length. They normally shed their skin two or three times a year to accommodate growth, each time adding a rattle to the tail. The brittle rattles are composed of a material called keratin—the same material in human fingernails. Because rattles are periodically lost and replaced after shedding, the number of rattles is not a reliable indicator of a snake's age.

Experts aren't sure why the rattle evolved, but some feel its purpose is simply to help the snake avoid trampling by warning approaching ungulates like deer and bison of its presence. Another theory holds that the rattle's purpose is to direct the attention of predators to the snake's tail and away from its head. In any event, once you've heard the distinctive buzz of a rattlesnake, you're not likely to forget the sound. Interestingly, several nonvenomous snakes (bull snakes, in particular) and the burrowing owl (a ground-nesting bird) do a pretty good imitation of the rattlesnake's rattle.

When you're in snake country, it goes without saying you should be careful where you place your feet and hands. And don't walk softly—although snakes are deaf to sounds in air, they are extremely sensitive to ground vibrations. Once warned of your presence, a rattlesnake's usual reaction is to disappear into a hole or sound off with a rattle. But rattlesnakes don't always rattle prior to striking, nor do they have to be coiled. Remember that a rattlesnake can strike about two-thirds of its length. To be on the safe side and avoid disturbing the snake, it's a good idea to maintain a distance of at least twice the snake's length.

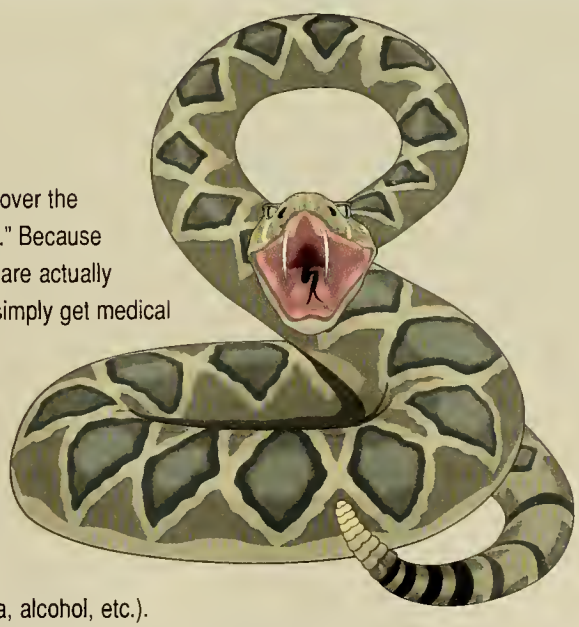
If you encounter a rattlesnake, the best policy is simply to admire it from afar and give it a wide berth. "Many of the people bitten by rattlesnakes each year are handling the snakes for some reason, often just fooling around with them," says Dennis Flath. "A lot of accidents could be avoided if people would simply leave snakes alone."

Why are so many humans alternately fascinated and terrified by what Emily Dickinson, in her poem, *The Snake*, referred to as "a narrow fellow in the grass"? Psychologists estimate that more than half of us feel discomfort in the presence of snakes and 20% of us feel intense fear. Naturalist Peter Steinhart, in an essay for *Audubon* entitled "Fear of Snakes," described his reactions this way:

> Count me among the fearful. Sometimes a snake in the path just stops me cold. For an instant, before I quite know what it is, my mind becomes a hen house of confusion. Some pallid neuron throws a switch and the pressure falls in my arteries, a cold breath rakes the back of my neck, and resolve dribbles like drainwater down my arms.
>
> I cannot account for this sudden flush of fear. I have read the books that say snakes are entitled to ride this planet. And not all snakes frighten me. I have nodded approvingly at rattlers in the hills....Here on the woodland trail, once the spasm of doubt passes, once I frame the creature in certainties and give it a name, order is restored.

While most of us are likely to experience a sudden surge of panic when we unexpectedly encounter a rattlesnake, we can take comfort in knowing they aren't sinister creatures lying in wait for unsuspecting humans; they are simply going about the business of living, which includes preying on mice and other small mammals and avoiding large animals that may cause them harm. The prairie rattlesnake is a fascinating part of our fauna, and like all Montana's wildlife, it should be treated with respect. ■

If You Are Bitten



Although first-aid advice for poisonous snake bites has changed drastically over the years and is still somewhat controversial, the guiding rule today is "do no harm." Because rattlesnake bites vary in severity depending on many factors (about one-fourth are actually "dry" strikes in which no venom is injected), most authorities agree it's best to simply get medical help as quickly as possible. In the meantime, take the following steps:

1. Get away from the snake—it could bite you again—and try to stay calm.
2. Get medical assistance as soon as you can, but remember that heavy exertion (like running) will circulate the venom faster.
3. Remove any restrictive clothing, jewelry, etc.
4. Immobilize the limb as much as possible and keep it below the level of the heart.
5. Avoid drinking any beverage that may stimulate the heartbeat (coffee, tea, alcohol, etc.).
6. Don't use ice packs or cold sprays, incision and suction, or tourniquets. Cold treatment may actually speed the deterioration of tissue, while an incision may spread the venom into surrounding areas. Tourniquets, unless applied by medical professionals, can cause unnecessary complications.

Finding Common

Ground

by JOHN FRALEY

BARBARA THOMAS

A state/tribal agreement is working for hunters and anglers.

IN 1855, THE HELLGATE TREATY established the Flathead Reservation, home of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes as well as many non-tribal members. The treaty guaranteed hunting and fishing rights for tribal members throughout the reservation and aboriginal territories. Tribal members make the point that wildlife, hunting, and fishing have been deeply rooted in tribal culture for thousands of years.

"Each native fish has a special name in our language," says Brian Lipscomb, division manager for Fish, Wildlife, Recreation and Conservation for the tribes. "But all non-native fish are referred to by a single word that means 'they were put there.'"

It's not hard to see why there is so much reverence for the lands and waters of the Flathead Reservation. It contains some of the best pheasant hunting country in western Montana. To the east, peaks of the Mission Mountains Tribal Wilderness tower over the reservation, and some of the icy streams draining these mountains support native bull trout. Along the shores of Flathead Lake and other waters, bald eagles increase in number each year. "The reservation still holds natural resource values lost by many states and tribes," says Lipscomb.

In November of 1990, after years of start-and-stop negotiations and murky jurisdiction over fish and wildlife management, the state and tribes struck an agreement to cooperatively manage these resources on tribal and non-tribal lands within the reservation boundary. The court-ordered agreement, signed by Tribal Chairman Mickey Pablo, then-FWP Director K.L. Cool, and then-Attorney General Marc Racicot, established a cooperative board of tribal and non-tribal members for managing fish and wildlife on the Flathead Reservation. According to most hunters and anglers, the Fish and Wildlife Board has operated smoothly and has been a big plus for managing the reservation's natural resources.

"The board has given non-tribal members a voice in reservation fish and wildlife management," says Lipscomb. "It's been a good forum for talking about regulations and funding issues, and it's helped discussions between the state and tribes. Resource professionals now work toward common goals in resource management."

DAVE BOOKS

The wetlands and uplands surrounding Ninepipe Reservoir offer some of the best pheasant and waterfowl hunting in western Montana. Tribal wildlife managers work cooperatively with FWP and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to operate hunter check stations and conduct research.

Lipscomb, who was raised in Saint Ignatius and graduated from Montana State University, calls the agreement that established the board a success story and a much better alternative than a court decision, which would have identified a winner and loser. He also points out that cooperative enforcement of fish and wildlife regulations is now more clear-cut and that license requirements for hunters and anglers are less confusing.

FWP's Region One (Kalispell) Supervisor Dan Vincent agrees with Lipscomb's assessment. "I see a genuine spirit of cooperation between the professionals of FWP and the tribes," says Vincent. "Our first priority is to manage for protection of the resource without regard to political boundaries."

Board Chairman Rod Johnson of Polson adds, "I'd rather work things out cooperatively among ourselves than rely on the Ninth Circuit Court in San Francisco for our direction."

As part of the agreement, the board established license fees for fishing and bird hunting on the reservation. These fees and other tribal funds go directly into fish and wildlife management programs.

Some have criticized the tribes for what they see as a lack of results for the amount of money collected from license fees. They call for more visible, on-the-ground fish and wildlife projects and more accountability.

"There were public hearings leading into the agreement, but we feel that when it came back from Helena there should have been an additional opportunity for comment," says Mike Hutchins, a Lake County commissioner. "In particular, we'd like to see more accountability from the tribes regarding where money collected from license fees is going, what it is being used for, and so on. Just as with any other budget process, we expect to be able to get those figures. If the agreement continues, we'd like to see a better accounting system, including a separate budget for the fees collected."

Board Chairman Johnson acknowledges that a substantial amount of money has been collected through license fees, but points out that the program is only into the third year. "In natural resource management, things don't happen overnight," he says. Johnson says the board is now preparing a report on the use of permit fees collected over the past three years.

"These funds are used the way any other agency uses license dollars," says Joe DosSantos, tribal fisheries manager. "It's been a great addition to our fisheries program. We use the funds on fisheries management planning, habitat and fish population monitoring, fish stocking, and on-the-ground projects like fish ladders, fish screens, and stream and lake improvements."

DosSantos, who holds a master's degree in fish and wildlife management from Montana State University, points to a project designed to increase hiding cover for fish in the East Bay of Flathead Lake and in Kicking Horse Reservoir. Wire nets filled with discarded Christmas trees are placed in areas where little cover exists, providing havens for young fish to avoid predation. Community members pitched in to help save on labor costs.

"This is the kind of project where anglers can see their license dollars go directly to work," he says.

Through cooperative projects with landowners, managers have worked to improve streambanks on private land. On Mission Creek and the Jocko River, sensitive streamside areas have been protected with fences while stockwater lanes still allow animals access to the streams. Future projects include plans for angler access.

Tribal fisheries managers, in cooperation with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, have led the way in developing screens to prevent fish from being diverted into irrigation canals. The screens are combined with state-of-the-art fish ladders to provide upstream and downstream access for fish. "We're trying to keep the natural fish production in the natural system," DosSantos says.

Many lakes have benefited from fish stocking efforts. Large waters like Mission, McDonald, and Saint Mary's reservoirs are planted annually to provide fishing opportunity. The tribes and local members of the BASS Federation recently teamed up to establish a warm water fishery that includes largemouth bass in Pablo Reservoir.

"We've also worked with several landowners to improve fish populations in smaller ponds," says DosSantos. "We want to make sure we have the right fish species in the right waters." DosSantos adds that the only stream planting underway involves the use of fish eggs and fish fry. For example, biologists planted eggs in Crow Creek upstream and downstream from Crow Creek Reservoir in an attempt to reestablish a fish population decimated by dewatering. Streams lacking spawning habitat or not accessible by spawning fish are also on the list for supplemental plants.

Managers have concentrated their fisheries monitoring efforts on high-use waters. "We're tracking populations of sensitive species like westslope cutthroat and bull trout in some mountain reservoirs," says DosSantos. "The tribes consider these species particularly important. We're also monitoring the fisheries through angler creel surveys. We recognize that the only way to build and maintain an effective fish management program is by basing it on sound information."

Work on Flathead Lake, which is managed cooperatively by the tribes and state, has been carefully coordinated with FWP managers. Biologists just completed a major angler creel survey, the first since 1985, that provided reams of information that will help guide management of the lake. Ongoing fish population surveys using gill nets and sonar methods round out the monitoring program.

The tribes administer a regulatory stream protection effort similar to the state's stream protection program. DosSantos points out that the tribes will emphasize public outreach and education efforts concerning the fisheries program in coming years.

Wildlife management on the reservation under the agreement has focused on monitoring upland gamebird and waterfowl populations, acquiring land, and improving wildlife habitat on tribal lands.

"We've taken an active role in inventorying wetlands and streamside wildlife habitats," says Dale Becker, tribal wildlife manager. "We look at the current state of the habitat, its potential, and then make management adjustments. We're working with landowners to protect wildlife values on their lands." Becker adds that inventory projects have been conducted in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Montana Riparian Association.

Becker, who has a master's degree in wildlife biology from the University of Montana, points to the importance of recent wildlife habitat purchases like the Cooper Ranch. "Most people recognize that you must protect wildlife habitat if you want to have healthy wildlife populations."

Tribal biologists, assisted by FWP biologists, operate check stations during the popular upland game bird and waterfowl hunting seasons in the fall. "We learn a lot from the hunters who pass through our stations," says Becker. "Most comments are positive. Now that we have an agreement to manage wildlife, I think most hunters see that regulations are available in a more timely manner and are more understandable—this has been a problem in the past."

BILL MCRAE

Within the reservation boundaries lie Ninepipe Reservoir, Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area, and Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge. This wetland complex supports thriving waterfowl and pheasant populations, and is a hunting hotspot. "Ninepipe *is* pheasant hunting in northwest Montana," says FWP Wildlife Area Manager John Grant. "It's not unusual to see 250 vehicles parked here on opening day of pheasant hunting season."

Tribal wildlife officials work cooperatively with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and FWP to conduct wildlife research and waterfowl surveys on the reser-

vation. These studies provide the information necessary to manage wildlife effectively. Becker also points out that, like the fisheries managers, tribal wildlife managers work closely with state managers on a variety of programs.

Wildlife management has always been important to the tribes, according to Division Manager Lipscomb. "By managing the reservation's fish and wildlife, we're not trying to take anything from non-tribal members," he says. "We're just trying to effectively manage what we've always had."

Lipscomb points to the Crow Reservoir project as an example of how the tribes take resource protection seriously. When the water flowing out of the reservoir was shut off, fish populations were devastated. The tribes took the issue to court and won a settlement that called for fish screens to prevent fish deaths and a fish stocking program in Crow Creek to reestablish the trout population.

As additional evidence of the tribes' commitment to resource stewardship, Lipscomb highlights hunting regulations like the reservation-wide steel shot requirement, shorter shooting hours, active wilderness management, and a protective stance on bull trout management. "I believe we've led the way on many of these issues," he says.

Many fish and wildlife managers in the Pacific Northwest agree, calling the tribes' program one of the best. "The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes have an outstanding fish and wildlife program," says Jack Donaldson, executive director for the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority. Donaldson, who leads an organization of Indian tribes, state agencies, and federal agencies, adds that tribal personnel have been excellent to work with.

Although Lipscomb says some tribal members believe the tribes gave away too much in the agreement, he recognizes that some non-tribal members believe the opposite. Some disagreement on both sides probably indicates a good balance, he reasons. "One of our management challenges is to preserve what we have here as use increases," he says, pointing out that some tribal members believe the agreement will increase use of the rivers and uplands. "You may not be able to go down to that same spot on the river some day and not share it with others—that's just reality." According to Lipscomb, the tribes believe in a holistic concept of resource management. "We try to take all resources into account in management; this approach is part of our culture."

Tribal Chairman Mickey Pablo makes the point that the tribes' wildlife land protection program actually creates more recreation opportunity for members and non-members. "When we buy lands they remain open for people to recreate, fish, and bird hunt," he says. "Right now, much of the private land is posted. So land acquisitions using funds generated by the sale of permits and other tribal funds provide hunting and fishing areas that would not have been open for individuals to enjoy." Pablo adds that only about one-fifth of the dollars used by the tribes for wildlife land acquisition come from the sale of permits.

BARBARA THOMAS

The Mission Mountains Tribal Wilderness is home to a spectacular array of wildlife, including grizzly bears (above) and bull trout.

The state/tribal agreement will be up for renewal this fall. Polson Outdoors, Inc., a club that has been active in Fish and Wildlife Board meetings, has offered suggested changes on some of the licensing provisions of the agreement. These and other suggestions will be reviewed carefully during the process.

One outspoken critic of the agreement is Del Palmer, a non-tribal member who lives within the boundaries of the reservation. Palmer feels the agreement should not be renewed. "This agreement was hatched in the shade and kept in the dark," says Palmer. "I believe that the state and tribes sneaked off behind closed doors to negotiate an agreement without the support of those of us who own fee title land within the reservation boundaries."

Palmer maintains that the agreement is contrary to the U.S. Constitution, citing issues of landowner rights, cross-deputization, use of license funds, and lack of non-member participation in tribal government. "My deed gives me the same rights as anyone else with deeded land in Montana, whether it's within a reservation boundary or not," he says.

Palmer went so far as to hunt on his land without the required licenses, notifying wardens so he would be arrested. So far, Palmer has beaten the charges in court. "I'm going to keep challenging this agreement until it's dropped," he says. "This year, instead of 20 or 30 people hunting on my land without joint licenses, there's going to be a couple hundred."

Pablo acknowledges that not everyone is happy with the state/tribal agreement, but he believes the effort has been worthwhile. "I think its success is shown by the approximately 20,000 people who have participated annually in the permit system," he says. "We don't want to jeopardize such a large number of people enjoying the resource for a handful of people who for one reason or another don't like the agreement."

Governor Marc Racicot agrees. In a letter to a Polson resident who expressed concern about the agreement, the governor wrote: "I have observed, with a great deal of pleasure, the cooperative relationships that have developed between resource staffs of both the state and tribes and the unselfish time and effort donated by the board members. It appears to me that a great deal has been accomplished in the course of the past three years since the signing of the agreement. The alternative may have been three years of frustration while the issues were tangled in litigation." ■

SAM M. ESPELAND

GOOD DEEDS
Without Deeds

by PAT GUNDERSON

In February of 1994, the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission gave final approval to a complex conservation easement package involving three large parcels of land in eastern Montana. The agreement ensures that wildlife habitat—sagebrush, grassland, farmland, river bottom, and wetland—will be maintained in perpetuity, and guarantees sportsmen and women hunting access to more than 40,000 acres in four counties. The easements are the culmination of four years of effort involving, in addition to FWP, several landowners, the BLM, and the Department of State Lands.

THE SOUTH RANCH AND TAMPICO CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

SAM M. ESPELAND

SAM M. ESPELAND

Recently acquired conservation easements on the Page-Whitham Ranch have ensured protection and hunting access on 23,000 deeded acres of prime wildlife habitat in Valley County. The South Ranch Conservation Easement affects 19,000 acres of rolling sagebrush and grassland north of Fort Peck Reservoir (upper photo), while the Tampico Conservation Easement applies to almost 4,000 acres of bottomland and farmland on the Milk River west of Glasgow. Sage grouse and elk (opposite page) are two of the many game species inhabiting the South Ranch.

The process began in 1990 when FWP purchased the Brewer Ranch, a 34,000-acre (18,000 deeded) property adjoining the Powder River near Broadus in southeastern Montana. The original intent was to trade the deed to this property, with conservation easements attached, to another landowner (as then undetermined) who would agree to place similar easements on his or her property. In late 1992, FWP advertised statewide for such an exchange. Of three exchange offers received, the Page-Whitham Ranch proposal was deemed most beneficial to wildlife and recreation interests.

What exactly is a conservation easement? A conservation easement is much like the right-of-way easement acquired by a utility company to ensure permanent access to a narrow strip of private land for construction, use, and maintenance of a powerline. In other words, some of the personal property rights of the landowner are transferred to the utility company, and the easement becomes part of the deed to the land. In the case of a conservation easement, the rights acquired by the second party involve permanent protection of conservation values found on the land.

The easements negotiated by FWP for the Page-Whitham and Brewer properties basically ensure that wildlife habitat will be protected and that hunting access will be available to the public forever. Activities prohibited by the easements include exclusive outfitting or leasing to outfitters, subdividing, game farming, waste disposal, industrial uses, and some agricultural uses, such as commercial feedlots.

The use of conservation easements requires a somewhat different management philosophy than that traditionally applied to FWP-owned wildlife management areas (WMAs). Because the ranches remain privately owned, FWP does not have complete control over them. Although access is guaranteed, hunters may be required to check in at ranch headquarters. As on WMAs, travel or other restrictions to ensure safety for hunters and adjacent landowners and provide security for

wildlife may be specified in the management plans.

FWP is not primarily a land management agency, and therefore has to seek resourceful ways to affect privately owned wildlife habitat. Through conservation easements, the department can achieve wildlife management objectives and preserve our public hunting heritage while helping to keep land in traditional Montana uses. Easements also help stretch the sportsman's dollar by minimizing FWP investment, not only in terms of initial purchase price but in long-term operational and maintenance costs.

Under the conservation easement agreement involving the Brewer and Page-Whitham ranches, the Page-Whitham Ranch received the deed to the Brewer Ranch and $575,000 in exchange for attaching conservation easements to both properties. Including the initial purchase price of the Brewer Ranch, these easements, which cover 40,804 acres of privately owned land, cost sportsmen and women a total of $1.7 million. Thus, for about $41 per acre, conservation values have been protected and public access guaranteed in perpetuity on an area roughly a third the size of Flathead Lake.

The following sections describe the two conservation easements acquired from the Page-Whitham Ranch in areas west and south of Glasgow. The easement for the Brewer Ranch in southeastern Montana will be discussed in a future article.

South Ranch Conservation Easement

Page-Whitham's South Ranch cattle operation utilizes approximately 152,000 acres of state, federal, and privately held sagebrush/grassland habitat in the Missouri River breaks of southwestern Valley County. This portion of the ranch provides spring through fall grazing for 750 mature cows and 1,500 yearlings. While FWP's South Ranch Conservation Easement applies technically to the ranch's 19,000 deeded acres, a management plan has been developed jointly for the larger area by the Page-Whitham Ranch, FWP, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the Department of State Lands (DSL). Overall goals are to protect and enhance the sagebrush/grassland and associated habitat types, to maximize recreation, and to preserve the overall integrity of these lands for future generations.

GAIL JACKSON

JOHN R. FORD

Originally established by stockman John Etchart in the early 1900s, the South Ranch consists of an open, rolling landscape dominated by sagebrush and grassland. It is unparalleled as wildlife and cattle country. Integral to the area's future management is the rest-rotation system of grazing that has been used on many of FWP's wildlife management areas to the benefit of both wildlife and livestock.

Specific objectives contained in the management plan for the South Ranch include:

- Maintaining and enhancing the soil and vegetation resources associated with sagebrush/grasslands.
- Providing quality year-round habitat for elk, mule deer, antelope, and prairie grouse.
- Maintaining a viable cattle operation.
- Minimizing game damage impacts on nearby private lands.
- Providing public hunting opportunities.

Easement covenants that protect and enhance habitat include the use of rest-rotation grazing, prohibition of any sagebrush manipulation (e.g., chisel plowing, burning, spraying), and prohibition of any plowing of the land. In essence, the easement covenants ensure that the ranch will always remain a livestock operation.

Two rest-rotation grazing systems will be employed on the South Ranch: a three-pasture system and a four-pasture system, both developed in cooperation with the Page-Whitham

ALAN G. NELSON

DAVE BOOKS

The Tampico Conservation Easement emphasizes management for white-tailed deer (above), pheasants, and waterfowl (right).

Ranch, BLM, and DSL. Nearly all the deeded land falls within the boundaries of the four-pasture system, while the three-pasture system will be used exclusively on BLM and DSL lands. Benefits of these systems include: (1) At any one time, five of seven summer range pastures will be available for wildlife use without the presence of cattle; this is especially important in the four-pasture system, which is located in a prime elk calving area for a portion of the Missouri breaks elk herd; (2) during the nesting season, residual cover will be available for upland-nesting birds in three pastures, while two other pastures will be devoid of livestock; and (3) grazing conditions will be enhanced through range improvements and the grazing system itself.

Response of vegetation, wildlife, and livestock will be closely monitored and evaluated, and adjustments made if necessary. Scheduled range improvements to increase the effectiveness of these systems include installation of water wells and electric and propane pumps, and construction of a water pipeline system and stockwater ponds.

The management plan also calls for managing hunters through specific, yet flexible, travel management plans. Some travel restrictions will be necessary to provide wildlife security during hunting season. Another management strategy to minimize game damage on neighboring lands involves planting "lure crops" to coax elk away from adjacent agricultural fields.

Tampico Conservation Easement

Page-Whitham's Tampico Ranch property consists of 4,000 acres of cottonwood-dominated bottomland and irrigated farmland along the Milk River west of Glasgow. This unit is used to provide hay and corn silage for the ranch's winter livestock feedlots. Originally founded by Jim Hill of the Great Northern Railroad in the late 1800s, the Tampico Ranch was the first irrigated farm on the Milk River. Hill's vision for the ranch was to encourage settlement of the area and provide future business for his railroad.

Specific management goals for the Tampico Conservation Easement include the following:

- Maintaining and enhancing the riparian habitat along the Milk River.
- Providing quality year-round habitat for pheasants and white-tailed deer.
- Providing wetland habitat for waterfowl.
- Maintaining agricultural productivity of the ranch.
- Providing public hunting opportunities.

Through the cooperatively developed management plan, approximately 350 acres of agricultural fields will be seeded into a dense nesting cover mixture of grasses and legumes. Scattered throughout the property, these fields will provide excellent nesting habitat for pheasants, waterfowl, and other upland-nesting birds.

The management plan divides the easement area into four pastures. Two of the four, in alternating years, will provide winter grazing for livestock. To provide high-quality winter habitat for wildlife, livestock will be excluded from the fields planted to dense nesting cover in the two grazed pastures. Conversely, haying will be allowed on fields in the two ungrazed pastures after July 15 when upland birds and waterfowl have finished nesting. Despite haying, good habitat will remain in these pastures along the ungrazed field edges and irrigation canals through fall and winter.

Waterfowl habitat will be maximized in three cut-off oxbows, or sloughs, located along the Milk River. The management plan calls for maintaining adequate water levels in the sloughs during spring, summer, and fall to increase production of wood ducks, mallards, Canada geese, and other waterfowl. ■

MICHAEL H FRANCIS

The primary goal of the South Ranch and Tampico conservation easements is to provide year-round habitat for deer, elk, antelope, upland gamebirds, and waterfowl as well as hunting access.

The South Ranch and Tampico Conservation Easements

Location: South Ranch—In Valley County approximately 35 miles southwest of Glasgow in the Missouri River breaks. Tampico—In Valley County approximately 11 miles west of Glasgow along the Milk River.

Size: South Ranch—151,789 acres (19,189 deeded); Tampico—3,770 acres.

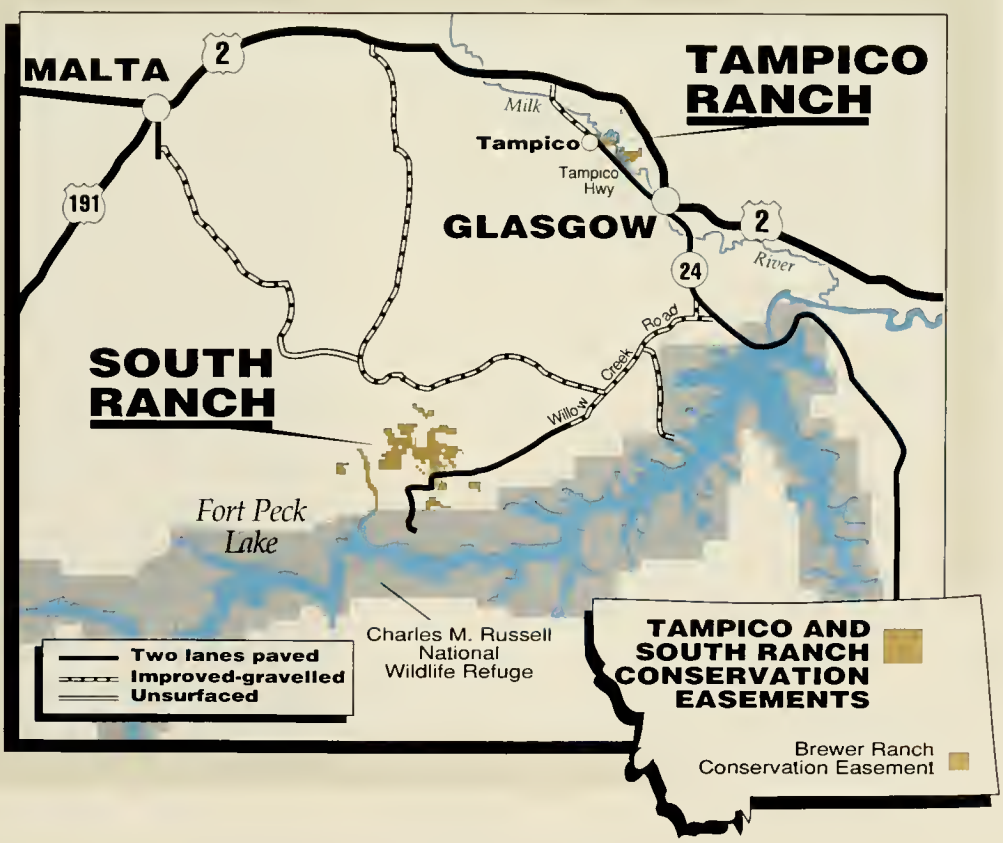
Acquisition date: 1994.

Access: South Ranch—Take State Highway 24 south from Glasgow 9 miles to Willow Creek Road turnoff, continue south for 3 miles, then turn west and drive 31 miles to South Ranch entrance. Tampico—Take the Tampico Highway west from Glasgow 11 miles to Tampico Ranch headquarters.

Management goal: South Ranch—To provide year-round habitat for wildlife by enhancing productivity of sagebrush/grassland vegetation, and to provide public recreational opportunities. Tampico—To provide year-round habitat for wildlife by maximizing wetland productivity and planting agricultural fields to dense nesting cover, and to provide public recreational opportunities.

Hunting opportunities: South Ranch—Archery and rifle seasons for elk (permit only), mule deer, white-tailed deer, and antelope are open to licensed hunters. Upland bird hunting opportunities exist for sharp-tailed grouse and sage grouse. Tampico—Archery and rifle seasons for white-tailed deer are open to licensed hunters. Upland bird and waterfowl hunting opportunities exist for pheasants, ducks, and geese.

Wildlife Viewing: South Ranch—Elk, mule deer, antelope, prairie grouse, and small mammals are present year-round. A variety of raptors, songbirds, and waterfowl are present spring through fall. Tampico—White-tailed deer and pheasants are present year-round. Waterfowl are abundant spring through fall, and furbearers such as beaver, muskrat, and mink are present year-round. Wildlife viewing on the Tampico property requires permission from ranch headquarters.



PERSPECTIVES:

In September, It's Sharptails

RON SPOMER

by BERNIE KUNTZ

On the Montana prairie, the hunter's calendar has three seasons. In November, it's deer and ducks. In October, antelope and pheasants. But in September, it's sharptails.

In the still, cool mornings, with shells stuffed into every elastic holder of your vest, you walk the fields and hills, talking to the dogs and enjoying the heft of a familiar shotgun.

Some years there is a lot more walking than shooting, but there

DAVE BOOKS

DAVE BOOKS

is always shooting—even in the poor years—if you work hard enough, if you walk and hunt and do things right.

The first flush is always startling, a covey of sharptails clucking and rocketing out of the tawny grass. One shot. Two shots. A bird down. The dog races to retrieve it, and brings it proudly back. The bird is warm and gray and white with long, tufted feathers on its legs.

At lunch you sip ice-cold cans of pop from the cooler, and eat cold chicken, potato salad, and homemade buns. You talk about hits and misses, the country, and the

MICHAEL H. FRANCIS

birds. In the afternoon you walk some more, until the hunters, too tender of foot and ample of waistline, say "I've had enough for today."

In late afternoon you sit on a high knoll and look out over the grassy hills, buttes, and berry-filled draws where the sharptails live. You watch the setting sun wash the prairie in golden light and reminisce about dogs and friends and hunts gone by.

You may come back seeking sharptails on a frosty morning in October, or after a November snowfall. But you know the very best of it is now, in September. ■

MIKE GURNETT

MULE DEER

Are More Fun

story and photos by BILL MCRAE

AN AMAZING THING about old hunting photos is that the people in them grow younger each year. For example, it's hard to believe that the dark-haired young man in the 1963 Ektachrome is really the same person I saw in the mirror this morning. Another interesting phenomenon, noted while sorting pictures from my 40-year career as an outdoor writer/photographer, was that an extraordinary percentage of the shots involved some aspect of mule deer hunting. Moreover, the youthful hunters seemed to have been having fun.

"This is portentous," I thought, sensing something big. Cerebral wheels began turning and, in no time, I'd postulated an erudite theory regarding big game hunting in Montana. Admittedly, it doesn't rank with Einstein's theory of general relativity or Hubble's revelation that the universe is expanding, but my theory (call it "McRae's law" if you like) is that, in Montana, more people have more fun hunting mule deer than any other species.

Since fun is nebulous (people sometimes think they're having fun when they're not, and vice versa), this

"It's hard to believe that the dark-haired young man in the 1963 Ektachrome is really the same person I saw in the mirror this morning."

"Admittedly, it doesn't rank with Einstein's theory of general relativity or Hubble's revelation that the universe is expandin like) is that, in Montana, more people have more fun hunting mule deer than any other species."

theory may never be conclusively proven. That's okay because, similarly, it can't be proven wrong.

"Is this guy serious?" you might ask. Yes, in a way, because much evidence exists, both factual and subjective, to suggest that mule deer hunters really *do* have more fun. That shouldn't surprise anyone, but it might, since most of us tend to take mule deer for granted.

On the factual side, harvest statistics, dating from the beginning of record keeping in the early 1940s, clearly show that the mule deer has long been Montana's No. 1 big game animal—outnumbering other plentiful species, such as white-tailed deer, antelope, and elk, by wide margins.

The numbers, which have fluctuated greatly depending on population cycles and weather conditions, show mule deer harvests varying from a low of 26,323 in 1976 to a high of 112,873 in 1984, with the 1993 harvest totaling 86,280. White-tailed deer, our second most important species, went from 13,444 in 1945 to a high of 60,369 in 1993. Pronghorn antelope, a tremendous wildlife management success story, increased from 540 animals harvested in 1944 to 43,019 in 1993. Elk, though highly coveted and much hunted, are considerably behind the others, going from 6,400 in 1952 to a high of 31,765 in 1991, with a 1993 harvest of 21,779. Harvests for other big game species, including mountain lions, mountain goats, bighorn sheep, moose, and black and grizzly bears, are more often counted in hundreds than in thousands.

What do these statistics prove? Assuming there is a connection between hunting success and one's enjoyment of the sport, they prove my contention that people have more fun hunting mule deer. And, presumably more time was spent hunting mule deer, which also equates to having fun. Admittedly, the numbers don't prove the mule deer is our most popular animal. If this were a popularity contest the elk would probably win.

The thing the mule deer has going for it, besides a large population, is its widespread distribution. White-tailed deer, our second most plentiful species, generally inhabit stream bottoms and the lower reaches of mountain valleys; antelope are found primarily on the plains; and elk inhabit mountainous terrain and a few remote badlands. Mule deer, though, inhabit all types of terrain, from the highest to the lowest, from Yaak to Monida in the west to Plentywood and Alzada in the east. It is probably safe to say that no Montanan lives more than 10 miles from huntable mule deer.

Such statewide abundance says important things about mule deer: First, they are highly adaptable; second, contrary to popular belief, they are very intelligent; and third, they are prolific. In short, they are survivors, which is what counts in nature.

In terms of specific hunting opportunities, Montana residents can buy an "A" deer license that permits them to hunt mule deer practically anywhere in the state. And, as if that weren't enough, they also can apply for special "B" deer licenses that allow them to take additional mule deer in specified hunting districts.

Nonresident hunters don't have it quite as good, but they haven't been left out in the cold either. Their options include special drawings for 17,000 big game combination licenses that cover deer, elk, fishing, and upland game birds; 6,000 deer combination licenses that include deer, fishing, and upland game birds; and numerous "B" deer licenses, valid in specified hunting districts.

Another important consideration is that mule deer are relatively easy to hunt. That isn't to say they are always pushovers, because hunting them can be as easy or as hard as you want to make it, depending on how choosy you are. If you're a meat hunter shooting for the dinner table, filling a license shouldn't take more than a day or two. If, on the other hand, you're a trophy hunter with sights set for wall-hangers, you'll find muley bucks at least as hard to hunt as trophy whitetails. Plus, you'll find their environs much harder to negotiate.

A third class of hunters, to which most of us belong, is the hybrid meat/trophy variety, who would give their eyeteeth for a whopper buck but who will invariably settle for an eating deer as the hunt draws to a close. Waiting for just the right animal is a risky game when played with species like elk or antelope, but mule deer are so plentiful that one seldom gets skunked.

HAVING LOOKED AT THE MULE DEER'S numerical superiority, let's move to the subjective side of the equation, which admittedly is hazier. And since it is impossible to know exactly how others feel, I'll refer mostly to personal experiences. That's tacky, of course, but as Henry David Thoreau said, "I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well."

For those who might object to the use of the word "fun" to describe hunting, I should explain that I have seldom, if ever, approached a fallen animal with a grin on my face. Despite the sweetness that comes with success, taking the lives of other living creatures is not fun for me. I suspect that most hunters feel the same way. My photo files seem to bear this out. So-called

ut my theory (call it 'McRae's law' if you

"hero shots" from the early years, both of others and of myself, invariably show somber people posing with dead animals. This changed as time went on but only because I started forcing myself to smile and asking others to do likewise. Perhaps that was a mistake, and in the future I'll let people facially express the seriousness of the moment. Nonetheless, hunting as a total experience—being outdoors, touching nature, the camaraderie with other hunters, searching for game and sometimes finding it, stalking, eating delicious game meat, and collecting fine trophies—is all great fun. We needn't apologize for that.

The fact is, hunting has been fun for me, and as a rule I have had the most fun when hunting mule deer. Why? This may sound strange, but I think the main reason is that I don't take mule deer hunting too seriously, while I sometimes get uptight with other species. Bighorn sheep are the worst in this respect because getting a permit to hunt them is apt to be a once-in-a-lifetime deal. The normal routine (and the wisest) is to forsake all other hunting and concentrate on getting a sheep until it becomes an obsession.

For example, when I drew my sheep permit in 1980, I hiked more than 100 miles along the ridgetops of some of Montana's roughest mountains, eating freeze-dried food and sleeping in a lean-to through all kinds of weather. The hunt, which culminated in a record-class ram, was one of my greatest outdoor adventures, but I wouldn't use the word "fun" to describe it.

Elk hunting also has its serious side because back when Mary and I were raising three boys and a girl, a generous supply of elk venison in the freezer meant having extra money for necessities like shoes, and niceties like Christmas presents. A mule deer or two usually filled out the menu, but we could take getting them for granted to the extent of being a little choosy. With elk we usually hunted long and hard, taking what we could get, and there were years when we didn't get one.

Don't misunderstand, I enjoy elk hunting, but the single word that best describes it is not "fun" but "work." Elk are much harder to find—meaning that there are more miles to go and more mountains to climb—and when you finally get one on the ground the hard work really starts. That's especially true if you tend to shoot them on the backside of ridges far from roads, as we often did. Backpacking the meat and trophy often takes six to eight grueling trips. I've carried elk meat

"As I approach the time in life when people tend to live in the past, I find that hunting has given me a treasure trove of memories, the most cherished of which involve my children."

until my shoulders bled and my feet had blisters as large as silver dollars. Again, "fun" isn't the right word.

We hunted mule deer the same way (apparently we weren't smart enough to know there were alternatives). But compared with elk, deer are easy to carry out of rough terrain. The boys and I did it dozens of time, and as recently as 1993 the old man in the mirror backpacked a big buck two miles out of the mountains in less than two hours.

My procedure is to bone the front half, putting the meat into a game bag, leaving the hindquarters intact and unskinned. This way two people with sturdy pack frames can simply pick a deer up and walk away with it. When alone, I leap-frog the loads, relaying each about 200 yards beyond the other. This works great because the trips back with an empty pack allow me to rest my shoulders and legs. Dragging game is okay if there is snow on the ground and you don't have far to go. Otherwise, carrying it is easier, and the meat stays cleaner.

Another reason I particularly enjoy mule deer hunting is that I am enthralled with the rough-cut terrain they inhabit. The limestone ridges of the Rocky Mountain Front and the Missouri River breaks come to mind. Seeing the scenery and touching the land are important to me, and such tangled terrain perfectly fits my favorite hunting style of spot and stalk. As a lifelong optics junkie, nothing suits me better than sitting on a promontory with a binocular and spotting scope and visually picking the terrain apart, bush by bush and rock by rock. I see lots of deer and other wildlife that way, and even if I don't take something, at day's end I'm totally happy.

AS I APPROACH THE TIME in life when people tend to live in the past, I find that hunting has given me a treasure trove of memories, the most cherished of which involve my children. Kids never forget their first hunting experiences, and fathers or mothers don't forget either. Besides, hunting is a great way to teach youngsters important lessons about safety, ethics, conservation, the rewards of getting up early and working hard, load sharing, and the finality of death. Together we harvested mountain goat, bighorn sheep, elk, black bear, ante-

"Kids never forget their first hunting experiences, and father or mothers don't forget either....Together we harvested mountain goat, bighorn sheep, elk, black bear, antelope, and a grizzly bear, but the sum of our hunting adventures would have been much smaller were it not for mule deer."

lope, and a grizzly bear, but the sum of our hunting adventures would have been much smaller were it not for mule deer.

Those hunting seasons were short periods in all our lives, and my, how the kids grew, both physically and mentally. In a few brief years they went from being unable to hold a rifle steady to becoming expert shots; from tagging along behind until I felt sorry for them and carried their guns to outwalking and outclimbing me. Then, much too soon, they spread their wings and were gone to make their way in the world and raise families of their own. Mary and I haven't tried to live their lives for them, and they come home whenever possible—sometimes to hunt.

This past season our 37-year-old son Mark, a geophysicist for an oil company in Texas, came home to hunt elk and mule deer. We revisited the old haunts, and in doing so, he passed up a respectable muley buck in the exact spot where he had taken his first deer—a similar buck—24 years earlier. Also, we climbed mountains from the past, which somehow had gotten taller and steeper. While climbing one particularly precipitous slope my legs got a bit wobbly, and he offered to carry my rifle. After swallowing hard, I let him take it. Turnabout is fair play, I concluded.

Mule deer have also given me much pleasure apart from hunting. That's because I've earned a significant portion of my living as a wildlife photographer, and mule deer photos have always sold well. For each day I've spent hunting mule deer, I suppose I've spent at least 10 days photographing them. Photography is a great way to get to know a species, its habits, and its habitat. I've even tagged along with big bucks when they've headed for cover and have taken midday siestas with them. In case you're wondering, wildlife photography and hunting are two completely different worlds, and I have never hunted an animal that I had previously photographed.

After all that I've said, this may sound strange, but I can't honestly say that the mule deer is my favorite big game animal. That's because I'm so fickle that whatever species I'm presently hunting tends to be my favorite. But if the gods of the hunt got mean-spirited and decreed that I must hunt only one species for the rest of my days, I'd choose the mule deer. ■

LONG-TIME ENFORCEMENT CHIEF KENT RETIRES

Erwin "Erv" J. Kent, who served as administrator of FWP's Enforcement Division for 17 years, retired from the department on July 1 after a 36-year career as a Montana game warden.

Kent, who began his career as a district warden in Bozeman after graduating from Montana State University in 1958, was transferred to the Helena district in 1962. After being promoted to the position of warden sergeant in Helena in 1967, he was named an administrative officer for the Enforcement Division in the Helena headquarters in 1968 and subsequently assistant chief of law enforcement in 1969. Kent assumed his role as administrator of the Enforcement Division during the summer of 1977.

During his tenure as administrator, FWP saw greatly increased cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that culminated in the successful Operation Trophy Kill and Operation Falcon undercover investigations in the mid-1980s. Other notable achievements of the division with Kent at the helm were the marked growth of FWP's special investigations unit, the creation of the state's highly successful TIP-Mont "Turn In Poachers" program, and the Montana legislature's enactment of civil restitution penalties against those taking wildlife illegally.

One aspect of the job that Kent placed special emphasis on during his three and a half decades as a game warden was working to maintain trust and respect among FWP employees, landowners, and users of the state's fish and wildlife resources. "We've seen some marked progress in that area in recent years," said Kent, "and although there's more work to be done, I think it speaks well of the efforts of our game wardens and others in the field who have direct contact with our constituents on a daily basis."

Kent also said the successes of the Enforcement Division's undercover operations in recent years, the division's increasing use of new technologies to thwart license fraud, and FWP's push to involve the public to a greater extent in enforcement matters have been instrumental in positioning the agency for the challenges of the 21st century.

"Of course, I've seen incredible changes in the [wildlife law enforcement] profession since I first put on a game warden's badge," he noted, "and they've all raised our level of effectiveness in caring for the resources the agency manages and protecting the interests of Montana's citizens. I'm happy to have had the opportunity to play a part in this growth."

Kent said he has no immediate plans on how he will spend his hours off the phone, out of staff meetings, and away from consultations on legal matters, but that he and his wife, Carol, plan to spend long-overdue time with their three grown children, Debbie, Rod, and Scott.

As this issue of *Montana Outdoors* went to press, the Kents were off to glittery Las Vegas. "We're going to let Scott put us up for a while," Kent explained with a smile.

Kent is replaced by Beate Galda, a lawyer and member of FWP's legal unit.—*William Phippen, Information Officer, Conservation Education Division, Helena*

GENE FISCHER

Erv Kent, administrator of FWP's Enforcement Division, retired on July 1 after a 36-year career as a Montana game warden.

Hunters Help Feed the Needy

The number of hungry people in the United States is estimated at more than 30 million, with 20-25% of Montanans requiring help sometime during the year. With the magnitude of this problem, it's time for hunters to show they care.

Through the age-old tradition of sharing wild game and an innovative program called "Sportsmen Against Hunger," Montana hunters have helped many less fortunate people receive added protein in their diet in recent years. By contributing their excess game meat, sportsmen and women have provided a valuable resource for the Billings and Miles City Food Banks, the Rescue Mission, Family Services, Salvation Army, and Community Hope.

Sportsmen Against Hunger was started in 1989 by Safari Club International (SCI), a hunting and wildlife conservation organization headquartered in Tucson, Arizona. The program has grown to include SCI's many chapters throughout the United States and other parts of the world. The Montana Chapter, located in Billings, initiated the program locally in 1991 by collecting and distributing 3,400 pounds of wild game. In 1992 the amount of meat collected increased to 16,500 pounds, and in 1993 topped 40,000 pounds. For its efforts, the Montana Chapter has been recognized and awarded by the parent organization for having the most productive Sportsmen Against Hunger program in the nation.

Many good folks have joined in to make the program work in Montana. Hunters, ranchers, farmers, printers, butchers, television and radio people, and newspapers have all helped make it a success. The *Billings Gazette* has been a supportive partner, printing articles and advertising the program.

The Sportsmen Against Hunger program is a great way to help maintain and improve relations among hunters, farmers, ranchers, and wildlife enthusiasts. Along with helping to feed the less fortunate, the program lets people who don't hunt know that hunters care and that there is an ethical way of doing things.

The Montana Chapter of SCI kicks off its program in August of each year with a wild game dinner at the Rescue Mission in Billings. Chapter members from all over Montana donate the wild game, prepare and serve the meal, and do the clean-up. Local media people are invited to share the meal and ultimately promote this very worthwhile event. Spending a day at the mission helping to feed the hungry is guaranteed to kindle anyone's interest in the Sportsmen Against Hunger program.

The Montana Chapter of SCI would like to see the Sportsmen Against Hunger program expanded to other areas of the state. Anyone interested in helping with this project should contact one of the following individuals: Ron Barker, Billings (406) 248-5553; Teresa Mielke, Billings (406) 652-1950; Tom Erskine, Billings (406) 656-0496; or write Sportsmen Against Hunger, Montana SCI, P.O. Box 1754, Billings, MT 59103.—*Ron Barker, Chairman, Sportsmen Against Hunger, Montana Chapter SCI*

Duck Populations Rebound

After years of declines caused by drought and generally poor habitat conditions, the estimated breeding population of ducks rebounded sharply this year in response to widespread precipitation and improved wetland and nesting conditions, according to a survey conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Aerial surveys conducted in May revealed that overall breeding duck populations were up 24% to 32.5 million, compared with 26.3 million in 1993. This was 2% above the 1955-93 average.

Wet conditions were present throughout nearly all of the survey area, which covered 1.3 million square miles across the north-central United States, western and northern Canada, and Alaska. The estimated number of ponds in prairie Canada and the north-central United States totaled 6 million, 47% greater than in 1993 and 32% above the long-term average.

As a result, every duck species surveyed showed an increase compared with 1993. Mallard breeding populations rose 22% to 7 million (2% below the 1955-93 average). Big increases in southern Saskatchewan, Montana, and the Dakotas offset a decline in northwestern Canada. In addition, Minnesota and Wisconsin reported record high numbers of mallards in 1994.

Gadwall were up 32% to 2.3 million (75% above the 1955-93 average), with increases in both southern Saskatchewan and the eastern Dakotas. Green-winged teal were up 24% to 2.1 million (27% above 1955-93 average) and blue-winged teal were up 45% to 4.6 million (12% above 1955-93 average), with increases in southern Saskatchewan, Montana, and the Dakotas.

Meanwhile, scaup were up 11% to 4.5 million (18% below 1955-93 average), American wigeon 16% to 2.4 million (8% below 1955-93 average), northern shovelers 42% to 2.9 million (62% above 1955-93 average), northern pintails 45% to 3 million (33% below 1955-93 average), redheads 35% to 653,000 (13% above 1955-93 average), and canvasbacks 11% to 526,000 (2% below 1955-93 average).

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service administers or participates in a number of programs to manage, conserve, or restore waterfowl habitat. The North American Waterfowl Management Plan, an international partnership effort, has protected, restored, or enhanced more than 2.2 million acres of wetland habitat since 1986.—*U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

Fishes of Special Concern List Updated

In 1979 George Holton, then Assistant Administrator for FWP's Fisheries Division, developed a listing of Montana "fishes of special concern." Holton defined a fish of special concern as "a native Montana fish with limited habitats and/or limited numbers in the state." The list, unlike that under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), has no force of law. It is simply a watch list to alert agencies and the public as to the status of these native fish. It includes fishes that conceivably could become threatened or endangered if their situation worsens.

Since 1985 there has been increasing concern over the status of the bull trout, which today is found in less than half of the river and lake reaches in its native range in Montana.

The list is currently developed jointly by FWP and the Montana Chapter of the American Fisheries Society (MCAFS). MCAFS is a professional society composed of fishery biologists working in Montana. Recommendations for a fish to be added, removed, or changed in status are discussed at a meeting of the MCAFS. Changes approved by the chapter are then submitted to the FWP director for updating of the list.

The accompanying chart lists Montana fishes of special concern by class (left side). This chart reflects the following changes in the list:

(1) The bull trout has been upgraded from Class B to Class A. Bull trout were added to the list as a Class B species in 1985 when it was learned they hybridize with brook trout, resulting in sterile hybrids. At the time, the FWP database indicated that 40% of the state's bull trout streams contained brook trout.

Since 1985 there has been increasing concern over the status of the bull trout. A 1992 assessment prepared for the department indicated bull trout are currently found in less than 50% of the river and lake reaches in their native range in Montana. It also revealed that approximately half of these populations are at high risk for genetic contamination from brook trout.

In October of 1992 the bull trout was petitioned for listing under the ESA. On June 7, 1994, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) found that listing was warranted but "precluded," meaning there is sufficient scientific evidence to recommend listing but that other more critical species must be addressed first. This finding must be reviewed annually. The ESA classification of bull trout was changed to C-1, which means there is sufficient information on the biological vulnerability and threats to the species to support its listing as threatened or endangered.

(2) The blue sucker has been added to Class C. Historically, this species was found in 23 states and also in Mexico. It is the only species in the genus *Cycleptus*. The blue sucker is considered the best tasting of the suckers and was an important commercial species in the late 1800s.

In Montana, the blue sucker is native to the Yellowstone River and the Missouri River downstream from Great Falls. This species inhabits large rivers, where it prefers swift water. It is also found in large reservoirs. Blue suckers inhabit the same waters as several other fishes of special concern, including the pallid sturgeon and sicklefin chub. Like these other natives, the blue sucker has been adversely affected by habitat changes, particularly those caused by large dams that block passage to spawning grounds, alter the streamflow, and eliminate peak flows that initiate spawning runs. Dams also discharge cold, clear water as opposed to the warm, turbid waters in which these species evolved.

In 1993 the USFWS prepared a status review for this species, which concluded that the blue sucker should remain classified as C-2 under the ESA. The C-2 classification means the USFWS has information indicating that proposing to list as endangered or threatened is possibly appropriate, but that conclusive data is lacking.

When the fishes of special concern list was last updated in 1986, there were no federally listed threatened or endangered fish species in Montana. That is no longer true. The pallid sturgeon was listed as endangered by the USFWS on September 6, 1990. Several other species have been petitioned for listing, including the white sturgeon, paddlefish, sicklefin chub, sturgeon chub, redband trout, fluvial Arctic grayling, and bull trout. The chart accompanying this article provides the current status of each species under the Endangered Species Act (right side).

—Chris Hunter, Special Projects Bureau Chief, Fisheries Division, Helena

Montana Fishes of Special Concern

State Listing	Federal Category Under ESA
Class A - Limited numbers and/or limited habitats both in Montana and elsewhere in North America; elimination from Montana would be a significant loss to the gene pool of the species or subspecies.	
White sturgeon (*Acipenser transmontanus*)	Petitioned for listing C-1*
Pallid sturgeon (*Scaphirynchus albus*)	Endangered
Paddlefish (*Polyodon spathula*)	C-2**
Yellowstone cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki bouvieri*)	—
Westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi*)	—
Arctic grayling (fluvial) (*Thymallus arcticus*)	Petitioned for listing C-1
Bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*)	C-1
Class B - Intermediate between classes A and C. Limited numbers and/or habitats in Montana; fairly widespread and fair numbers in North America as a whole. Elimination from Montana would be at least a moderate loss to the gene pool of the species or subspecies.	
Interior redband trout (native rainbow) (*Oncorhynchus mykiss gairdneri*)	Petitioned for listing C-2
Sturgeon chub (*Hybopsis gelida*)	Petitioned for listing C-2
Sicklefin chub (*Hybopsis meeki*)	Petitioned for listing C-2
Class C - Limited numbers and/or limited habitats in Montana; widespread and numerous in North America as a whole. Elimination from Montana would be only a minor loss to the gene pool of the species or subspecies.	
Shortnose gar (*Lepisosteus platostomus*)	—
Pearl dace (*Semotilus margarita*)	—
Northern redbelly dace (*Phoxinus eos*) x finescale dace (*P. neogaeus*)	—
Trout-perch (*Percopsis omiscomaycus*)	—
Shorthead sculpin (*Cottus confusus*)	—
Spoonhead sculpin (*Cottus ricei*)	—
Blue sucker (*Cycleptus elongatus*)	C-2

***C-1** - Sufficient information exists on threats to the species to support listing as threatened or endangered.
****C-2** - Sufficient information exists to indicate the species may be threatened or endangered, but conclusive data is lacking.

CRP: DIVERGENT VIEWS

I grew up in Montana and graduated from Montana State in 1950 following service in the U.S. Navy during W.W. II. Jobs were scarce in Montana for 1950 graduates, which was the reason for my move to Washington State where I now reside.

I subscribe to *Montana Outdoors* because of my continuing love for the state, and I enjoy its excellent photography and articles.

"CRP at the Crossroads" in the May/June 1994 issue departs from your magazine's usual objectivity and prompted this letter. In fairness to Montana citizens, I challenge you to print a different point of view on CRP.

I have hunted in the states of Washington and Montana, and there is no doubt that CRP has improved wildlife habitat, nor that these two states have enrolled their poorest land in CRP. There is also no doubt that some large blocks of CRP land exist that are totally overrun by Russian thistle (tumbleweeds to some) with no evidence of grasses having ever been planted. Both states have taxpayer-funded Noxious Weed Control Boards but weed control on some CRP land is obviously nil.

Your article mentions that "most folks chasing pheasants today were born a little too late to reap the benefits of the 'soil bank' era." I can assure you that they were not born too late to reap the financial burden resulting from soil bank and other farm programs like it. Thousands of acres of virgin sagebrush land in Washington (and I'm sure also in Montana) were deliberately broken up, farmed a couple of years, then enrolled in Soil Bank. Today this marginal land is in CRP along with thousands of additional acres that were broken up and farmed in order to qualify for CRP.

How can you applaud CRP as such a great program when it permits this breaking up of new "land that should never have been farmed in the first place" (your words) in order to qualify for the program? It's a fatal flaw that cannot be explained away.

Arnie Kruse's comments are typically bureaucratic when he states: CRP is basically a cost-neutral program" and "it's money we're going to spend on farm programs one way or another."

Under CRP *all* taxpayers pay farmers an annual rental fee of about $35 an acre in Montana (more like $40 an acre in Washington) to leave their land idle for 10 years. Who coined this *"annual rental fee"* myth?

According to my information "marginal" Montana land is valued at around $150 per acre. A CRP payout of $35 an acre for 10 years equals $350 per acre, more than double its worth, and the farmer still owns the land! What a deal for the taxpayer! None of the above numbers include the cost of the bloated bureaucracies that administer the program. For verification visit a few county courthouses, not to mention the cost at the federal level.

If CRP is extended, the contract should state that the government has title to CRP land at the end of 10 years. Further, that said land will be set aside permanently for use by the public. This does not mean it would be rented back to stockmen for one-third the going rate of private pasture land is now the case with BLM and Forest Service land.

If this is too much to expect, then the maximum payment over 10 years should not be more than the value of the land at the time it was placed in CRP, and at the end of said 10-year period, CRP land should receive no additional government payments nor be farmed for 10 years, although grazing would be permitted.—*Don E. Newby, Kennewick, Washington*

We are a family of farmers here in Mississippi who are new subscribers to your fantastic magazine, and thoroughly enjoy the articles and scenic Montana pictures. However, we would like to respond to a letter sent to you last month (July/August 1994) from Mr. Wuerthner, regarding his criticism of CRP programs. Apparently Mr. Wuerthner has been refused permission to hunt and fish on privately owned farmland in Montana or elsewhere. Even though he has manipulated the figures in a manner that would make CRP appear on the surface to be another wasteful government program, the CRP program has breathed new life into many areas suffering from lack of adequate wildlife cover. As far as the monetary aspect Mr. Wuerthner refers to, the budget restraints and cutbacks that the USFWS and nearly every state DFWP have been experiencing for the past several years would make it virtually impossible for those agencies to operate and staff any more federally or state-owned properties. Only last month here in Mississippi, the USFWS threatened to suspend deer and waterfowl hunting on several national wildlife refuges for lack of funds to properly maintain their operation. Therefore, in our estimation it would be more feasible to compensate the farmer with the small CRP yearly payment than to have land go into the government inventory, which cannot be properly maintained and would be of no use to anyone. After all, who is a better steward of the land than the grass-roots farmer? Maybe Mr. Wuerthner can find some public hunting and fishing land close to home, because unless his attitude toward the CRP program and farmers' participation in such changes, he will most certainly be turned around on the porch when attempting to gain hunting and fishing privileges on a farmer's land.

Last but not least, how dare Mr. Wuerthner even mention the words "welfare" and "agriculture"" in the same sentence? Each and every state,

not just Montana, has problems and disasters in their agricultural community. But the farmer always tries to "work" himself back onto firm ground, not stand around in a welfare line as Mr. Wuerthner insinuates. Just sit back and watch the farmers in flood-devastated south Georgia. They will fight back stronger than ever next year, and they will succeed. And it will not be because of any "welfare" agricultural economy, either, Mr. Wuerthner!!

Thanks again for the opportunity to voice an opinion on the other side of an issue. Thanks, also, for a great magazine, which allows us to enjoy and experience Montana here in the confines of our homes. You see, we are just too busy "working" to take a few days off and see it for real.—*Eddie Hobbs, Moorhead, Mississippi*

Pretty Country, Pretty Dogs

I borrowed a May/June 1994 issue of your magazine so I could order a subscription. While looking through the magazine, I noticed an exceptionally beautiful picture on pages 3 & 4 in the article "CRP at the Crossroads" by Dave Books. Could you tell me what town (and county) that picture was taken in and also what breed of dogs are in that picture? I own Drahthaars, which are similar to German Wirehaired Pointers, which look like the dogs in the picture.

Thanks for all your help. I'm looking forward to starting my subscription. —*Jane S. Samstag, Middlefield, Ohio*

•*According to photographer Ben O. Williams, the photo was taken in Park County, and the dogs are indeed German wirehaired pointers.—Editor*

Widgeon or Wigeon?

Re William Phippen's article entitled "Cruwys Hits a Triple" in the March/April 1994 issue: At first I thought it might be a typographical error as the duck in the painting was described as a "wigeon." But then reading about the author on page 37 it was printed the same. As a former student at MSU taking wildlife technology and a game warden stationed in Roundup in the early '40s we spelled it "widgeon" (*Anas americana*). I'm afraid the FWP employee flunked the test.—*Ben H. Wahle, Jr., Burlingame, California*

•*We, too, were taught to spell it "widgeon," but apparently someone changed the rules a few years back. In the latest edition of Frank C. Bellrose's* Ducks, Geese, and Swans of North America, *it's spelled "wigeon," and Ducks Unlimited also spells it without the "d."* —Editor

"Birds of Passage" Reprints Available

Thanks for the recent edition of your publication; it was one of the best yet. I teach science at a military academy here in Virginia and am an MSU graduate. I am writing to request three reprints of your article "Birds of Passage" (July/August 1994) for my classes in the fall. It was absolutely superb, and I can correlate with eastern migrations.

Thank you for your help—keep up the good work with your great publication.—*Captain Gregory A. Moyer, Fork Union, Virginia*

•*"Birds of Passage" reprints are available at 50 cents apiece by writing Montana Outdoors, 930 West Custer Ave., P.O. Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701.*—Editor

Archery Club Aids D.A.R.E. Program

These days, one usually reads so much bad news about hunting as a sport and those who pursue it, I thought it might be refreshing to read something positive for a change.

Last fall, members of the Five Valleys Archery Club in Missoula sponsored their second annual "Sportsmen for D.A.R.E. Banquet." As a D.A.R.E. (drug abuse resistance education) instructor for the City of Missoula Police Department, I have been involved with this fine group of civic-minded sportsmen for the past couple of years. They contacted my department last year, saying that they wanted to do something positive for our community, as well as promote a positive image for their sport. Last year, after a tremendous amount of work by their members, they held their first banquet for D.A.R.E. They were able to raise over $5,000 for our local D.A.R.E. program. This year, the banquet and benefit auction topped even that effort, raising over $6,100 for our program and its kids!

We in the Missoula area are very lucky to have these people involved in our community, and are proud to call them our neighbors, friends, and fellow sportsmen.—*Officer Greg Jacobson, Missoula Police Department*

Zoo Visit Inspires Poem

While visiting Michigan, I took my young sons to the Detroit Zoo. My 9-year-old carefully observed the caged animals. When we returned to Grandma's house he wrote the following poem. To me it captures the splendor of Montana's great outdoors that is so well expressed in your magazine.—*Diane Petroni, Ennis*

The Zoos of Montana
by Christopher Petroni

The forests and fields, the grasslands and greenlands, are the zoos of the State of Montana.

The forests and fields, really do yield, the beauty and fame of Montana.

The forests and fields, the grasslands and greenlands, are the zoos of the State of Montana.

There's not much big cities, but I don't care. All you gotta do is sniff the air, to smell the flowers and feel the powers of the wildlife of Montana.

The forests and fields, the grasslands and greenlands, are the zoos of the State of Montana.

NEW ELKHORN REGULATIONS BOOST BULL ELK NUMBERS

by William Phippen
Information Officer
Conservation Education Division

Hunters in the Elkhorn Mountains southeast of Helena have been seeing a lot of bull elk in recent years. And it doesn't seem to make a difference if they aren't among the lucky few who can take a shot at them. Hunters say that just being able to see them makes their trips into the Elkhorns enjoyable.

The increase in branch-antlered bull elk in Hunting District 880, which incorporates the Elkhorns, has resulted from innovative hunting regulations and the support of hunters.

Prior to 1986, any antlered bull in the Elkhorns was legal game for an elk license holder during the general season. But by the mid-1980s concern was being expressed by hunters and biologists over the lack of bulls 2-1/2 years and older (branch-antlered bulls) in the population and the low number of bull elk observed on winter ranges. In 1985, out of 990 elk observed on winter range only nine were bulls and all of those were yearling (spike) bulls.

The lack of older bulls at that time wasn't a phenomenon limited to the Elkhorns. Indeed, many hunting districts in southwestern Montana, where access to prime elk habitat is as good as it is anywhere in the state, were experiencing similar shortages of branch-antlered elk. Public concern about the situation prompted the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission to direct FWP to experiment with new regulations that might produce more older bulls in an elk population.

Hunting District 880 was selected for testing new regulations because an ongoing, long-term study in the Elkhorns would provide the opportunity to monitor the effect of any changes.

The regulation that FWP wildlife biologists recommended to the Commission for the 1987 season was to make all spike bulls, defined as yearling bulls with a single spike antler or a branch shorter than four inches, legal game for all hunters holding general elk licenses. A limited number of permits would be offered through the special license and permit drawings for hunters seeking to shoot branch-antlered bulls, those with a branch or branches longer than four inches. But before implementing the regulation, FWP recommended that in 1986 the entire district be open to hunting of branch-antlered bulls only, to carry as many yearlings as possible into the population prior to issuing branch-antlered elk permits.

Since the fall of 1987 the spike/branch-antlered regulation has been in effect in the Elkhorns, with the only alteration being changing the permits to either-sex permits in 1990. The change was sought because it would allow permit holders to harvest an antlerless elk if they so desired and to make the regulation consistent with regulations in other districts where management is directed toward producing more bulls.

After an initial drop in hunter numbers following the new regulation's installation, more and more hunters are once again selecting the Elkhorns as their hunting area of choice. Since 1987, in fact, hunter numbers have increased 28% in HD 880, while statewide the number of elk hunters has increased by just 14%. Hunter numbers in 1991 and 1992 were all-time highs. Hunter support for the new regulation is not only evidenced by the use the area receives, but also from the results of a 1989 survey which showed that 73% of respondents agreed with maintaining the spike/either-sex permit regulation and that 80% applauded the decision to manage for older bulls.

If it is older bulls hunters want, then it is older bulls they are getting. Since the new regulation took effect in 1987, numbers of bull elk in the district have taken a dramatic leap, with over 100 being observed annually on the winter range and as many as 94 of these being branch-antlered bulls. For the period before the new regulation went into effect, 1982-85, out of an average total of 3,075 elk surveyed on the winter range, only 55 were bulls. For the period 1987-1992, in contrast, out of an average of 9,623 elk surveyed, 663 were bulls.

To the delight of hunters and wildlife managers alike, the age structure of bulls in the Elkhorns also took a sharp turn for the better. Before the new regulation was put in place, an average of only four out of 3,075 elk surveyed on the winter range were branch-antlered bulls. With the new regulation in place, an average of 328 bulls of the total 9,623 elk surveyed were branch-antlered bulls.

A total of 400 permits were issued during the period 1987-92 and the success rate on those permits was 46%. But they are not the only ones who are relishing the changes that the new regulation has brought about in the Elkhorns. Even if you aren't lucky enough to draw one of these highly prized permits, the opportunity to see numbers of branch-antlered bulls might prove almost as satisfying.

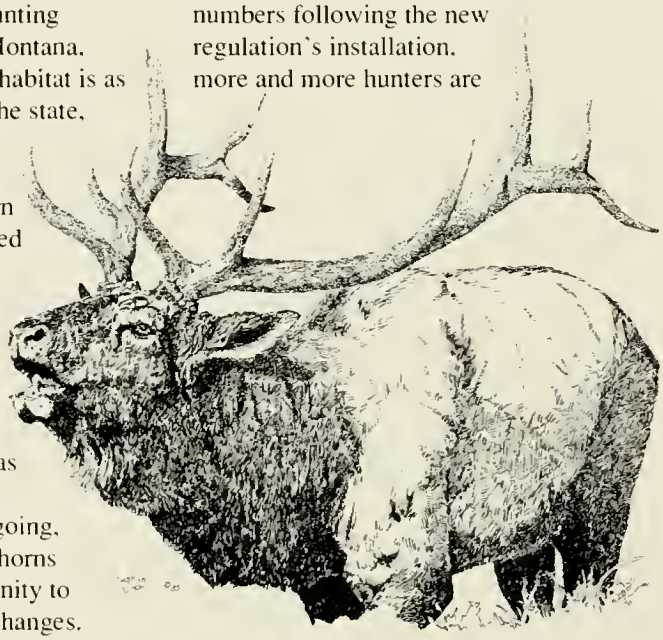


Illustration by Dan Coughlin © 1985

Contributors

Why do women hunt? The reasons vary, but in **Eileen Clarke**'s crowd the quality of meat that ends up on the table is a prime motivator. "Four years ago, I drew a Shiras moose tag," says Clarke. "I was immediately inundated with free advice: where to hunt, what to hunt with... and what time of year to find a really big bull." Clarke listened to the advice, then went out on opening day and shot the first young bull she saw. "My friends with the good advice—all of who happen to have been men—have given me a lot of good-natured grief since then over wasting a once-in-a-lifetime Shiras tag. Then I broil them a steak and they are amazed that a moose can be that tender." For some insights into the ways in which men and women differ in their approach to hunting, turn to "Why We Hunt" on page 2. Clarke, who says she "knows how it feels to be the only woman in hunting camp," is a Townsend-based free-lancer who frequently writes about the outdoors.

Clarke

In many states, tribal hunting and fishing rights have been contested in time-consuming and costly court battles. Working out mutually acceptable agreements between tribes and the state, says **John Fraley**, can avert litigation and form the basis for cooperative management of fish and wildlife resources. His article, "Finding Common Ground" (page 12), describes a state/tribal agreement that's working for hunters and anglers on the Flathead Reservation, home of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes in western Montana. Fraley is the department's information officer for Region One in Kalispell.

Although FWP is not primarily a land management agency, its approach to protecting wildlife habitat traditionally has been to purchase key parcels of land. An alternative way of protecting habitat and providing hunter access is with conservation easements—agreements that keep land in private ownership but specify that wildlife habitat will be conserved and hunting access will be available to the public forever. In this issue's "Lands Legacy" installment, **Pat Gunderson** describes a recently negotiated conservation easement package involving three large parcels of land in eastern Montana that will provide hunting access to more than 40,000 acres in four counties. To learn more about this innovative approach, see "Good Deeds Without Deeds" on page 17. Gunderson is a wildlife biologist in the department's Region Six office in Glasgow.

Gunderson

In November, it's deer and ducks. In October, antelope and pheasants. But in September, it's sharptails. At least that's the way many hunters in eastern Montana mark their calendars, says **Bernie Kuntz**, whose words accompany the photo spread on sharp-tailed grouse, dogs, and hunters in this issue's "Perspectives" section (page 22). An avid bird hunter who loves the Montana prairie, Kuntz is FWP's information officer for Region Three (Bozeman).

"Admittedly, it doesn't rank with Einstein's theory of general relativity or Hubble's revelation that the universe is expanding, but my theory (call it 'McRae's law' if you like) is that, in Montana, more people have more fun hunting mule deer than any other species." That's how **Bill McRae** introduces his "erudite" theory regarding big game hunting in Montana (he admits his theory may never be conclusively proven, but neither can it be proven wrong). The mule deer has long been Montana's No. 1 big game animal in terms of harvest, and it inhabits the entire state, says McRae. And mule deer hunting can be hard or easy, depending on how choosy you are. To find out why this veteran big game hunter believes "Mule Deer Are More Fun," turn to his article on page 25. McRae is an outdoor writer and photographer whose photos often appear in *Montana Outdoors*.

McRae

MO thanks the following photographers and artists for their contributions to this issue: **John Barsness**, and **Eileen Clarke**, Townsend; **Dan Coughlin**, and **Gene Fischer**, Helena; **Sam M. Espeland**, Glasgow; **John R. Ford**, Land O' Lakes, WI; **Michael H. Francis**, Billings; **Gail Jackson**, Lewistown; **Bill McRae**, Fairfield; **Alan G. Nelson**, and **Rodney Schlecht**, Great Falls; **Ron Spomer**, Troy, ID; **Bill Swanson**, and **Barbara Thomas**, Kalispell; **Tom J. Ulrich**, West Glacier; **Ben O. Williams**, Livingston; and **Greg Young**, Broomfield, CO. Thanks also to **Mike Gurnett**, Helena, who works for the department.